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SUBJECT: Disaster Management Capabilities and Engagement  
Opportunities in India

REF: A. 08 NEW DELHI 3104

[1](#)B. 09 NEW DELHI 2116

[1](#)1. (U) SUMMARY: Disaster Management (DM) in India means preparing for both natural and man-made disasters, everything from avalanches to chemical, biological, radiological, or nuclear (CBRN) incidents to terrorist attacks. India has chosen a tiered approach to DM in which states and districts have primary responsibility and the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) and National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) provide several forms of assistance, as does - on occasion - the Ministry of Defense (MOD). India has developed some robust DM capabilities, but faces an uphill battle in designing effective warning dissemination systems, developing a trauma care capability, and encouraging implementation of DM-related policies and practices by states and central Ministries. NDMA is considering the possibility of a regional DM role, and has requested U.S. technical assistance and cooperation in several areas. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (U) This cable was written jointly by the Embassy's EST, USAID, HHS, and ODC sections. Information was obtained by EmbOffs primarily from working experience, meetings with NDMA and NDRF members, discussions with USAID DM project implementers, meetings sponsored by the Health Attache, and information obtained from Indian publications and websites. A great deal of information on DM in India can be found on NDMA's well organized and up-to-date website (<http://ndma.gov.in/ndma/index.htm>).

NDMA AND NDRF PLAN, TRAIN, AND EXERCISE...

[1](#)3. (U) The chief catalyst for the improvement of India's DM capabilities over the past several years has been the NDMA's active and effective engagement with support from U.S. agencies. An autonomous institution, NDMA is mandated to lay down policies, plans

and guidelines for DM to ensure timely and effective response to disasters. Reporting directly to the Prime Minister and funded through the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), the group is headed by a Vice Chairman at the rank of a Cabinet Minister and eight members who each take responsibility for both a geographical region and an area of focus. NDMA's areas of focus include: CBRN emergencies (industrial or terrorism), cyber terrorism, mine disasters, environmental disasters, earthquakes, floods, river erosion, cyclones, tsunamis, landslides, avalanches, and forest fires. Government of India (GOI) ministers often are invited to attend NDMA meetings and both the Minister of Finance and Minister of Home Affairs have standing invitations, a practice which NDMA members told EmbOffs lessens turf wars between the ministries and encourages their buy-in. (Note: MHA has taken over six months to approve the USAID assistance work plan, highlighting bureaucratic delays potentially based on inter-agency tensions. End Note) The NDMA guidelines produced so far are very thorough, pulling from international resources and domestic priorities to produce actionable recommendations for prevention, preparedness and mitigation.

14. (U) Operating under the auspices of the NDMA, the National Disaster Response Force augments state response capabilities and provides specialized response skills through eight battalions of about 1150 people each taken from the paramilitary forces - two battalions each from the Border Security Force, Central Reserve Police Force, Central Industrial Security Force and Indo-Tibetan Border Police. Dedicated exclusively for disaster response, the units are strategically stationed at 9 locations to cover the most vulnerable and high-risk areas. A Delhi-based NDRF commander who participated in the Embassy's crises management exercise - the first

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time a GOI official has accepted our invitation to do so - told ESTOff that his unit was assigned to provide response capability for the October 2010 Commonwealth games in Delhi. Units serve a five year rotation at NDRF, and undergo continuous and specialized training at their battalion headquarters while also actively engaging in community capacity building programs and public awareness campaigns.

15. (U) NDRF has proposed that each battalion headquarters also be equipped to train state disaster response and civil defense forces. NDRF would also like to create in Nagpur a world class training center to conduct more advanced training FOR regional partners as well as Indian response forces. U.S. Agencies have recently begun to provide some support in this area, but there remains great potential for joint activity. With USAID support, a four member NDRF team is currently visiting leading U.S. disaster response institutions to assist in the design their state-of-the-art training facility. In the last year, the Embassy's Office of Defense Cooperation (ODC) has sponsored one NDMA and two NDRF officers to attend the Asia Pacific Center for Strategic Studies course "Comprehensive Crisis Management (CCM): Preventing, Preparing, and Responding." Two NDRF members observed the BlackICE 2 bioterrorism exercise this past September.

16. (U) Another angle of India's DM response capability is the Civil Defense Corps. Consisting primarily of volunteers, the Corps' mission is to safeguard the life and property of the civilian population and maintain the continuity of economic activities in the event of a hostile attack. This includes providing assistance in relief and rescue work during natural disasters. Training is conducted at three levels: local/town, state and national, including courses in Civil Defense and Disaster Relief Management at the National Civil Defense College in Nagpur. The 1968 Civil Defense Act is applicable throughout the country, but the Corps is only active in areas considered tactically and strategically vulnerable; at present, activities are restricted to 225 towns spread over 35 States/Union Territories.

...WHILE MINISTRIES, STATES AND DISTRICTS TRY TO EXECUTE

17. (SBU) Individual Ministries and States are responsible for implementing rules, regulations and policies recommended by NDMA for managing prevention and preparedness. There is no objective

measurement of their progress in doing so, and Post suspects such implementation will be slow to move through the bureaucracy in most cases. On the specific issue of biosecurity for example, an Embassy review of policy, regulations and practices showed that the GOI has not implemented the NDMA's recommendations. Fortunately, laboratories and companies working with dangerous biological pathogens generally follow internationally-recognized standards for secure storage and handling of pathogens of their own volition. (Note: Results of the Embassy review will be reported SEPTEL. End Note)

¶8. (U) Similarly, NDMA members tell EmbOffs that despite enthusiastic engagement at a theoretical level, State and District governments - with the notable exceptions of Orissa, Bihar and Gujarat - have been relatively slow to adopt processes and requirements set out by NDMA. Funding for state DM activities comes primarily from their general budget, and the states vary considerably in their DM funding levels. Despite their regular experience with natural disasters, most states and districts still lack comprehensive and long-term plans or a capacity to deal with man-made or large-scale disasters. When a disaster strikes, they rely heavily on national capabilities and, in some cases, on MOD

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capabilities for support. To encourage states to take a more proactive role, NDMA has begun providing to state governments a small amount of financial assistance as well as no-cost advisors to assist with planning. In addition, NDMA leads the state and district authorities in both table top and mock DM exercises and plans to conduct more than 100 of them by the end of 2009.

#### CAPABILITIES, ASSISTANCE REQUESTS, AND OPPORTUNITIES

¶9. (U) India has developed its disaster forecasting and response capabilities in partnership with U.S. organizations including USAID, the U.S. Forest Service, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the U.S. Geological Survey, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, Geo Hazards International, the International Resources Group, and others. Some of India's achievements in DM include:

- Establishment of a state-of-the-art tsunami warning center (REF A).
- Development of early warning forecasting systems for extreme climate events.
- Introduction of the Incident Command System for managing disaster response, with limited roll-out through simulations, training, and institutionalization materials.
- Reduction of earthquake vulnerability through engineering and risk management techniques.
- Implementation of community preparedness and response programs.
- Study and exposure tours to the U.S. and Australia.

¶10. (U) India's ability to provide trauma care in pre-hospital and hospital settings is extremely limited in both public and private hospitals. There are few training program for paramedics or Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) and very limited specialty training in trauma surgery, emergency medicine or critical care in India's medical schools. Emergency Departments are primarily staffed by non-specialists with training in other specialties. With approximately 2 million injury-related deaths annually in India, improved trauma systems and improved access to specialized trauma care may save up to 400,000 lives annually. Indian physicians participating in a U.S.-sponsored trauma workshop earlier this year told ESTOff that Delhi was at least 10,000 beds short of what will be needed for the 2010 Commonwealth Games.

¶11. (U) ODC plans to include NDMA members in two offerings of a Delhi-based Humanitarian Assistance PACOM-funded medical course "Critical Life Saving Skills for First Responders" next spring and summer. Under the auspices of a bi-national joint statement on Environmental and Occupational Health and Injury Prevention and Control, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has been working closely with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Embassy's Health Attache and a number of Indian and US partners on development of trauma systems in India. Focus areas for these

efforts include collaborative public health research and program activities with emphasis on injury prevention and surveillance efforts, development of pre-hospital care systems, exploring the possibility of establishing a trauma and emergency medicine curriculum in some of India's medical schools, and accreditation processes. This remains an area of great potential for collaboration and public health impact, offering U.S. physicians and medical students trauma care experiences they are unable to obtain in the U.S. while simultaneously improving trauma system capabilities and access to injury-related medical care in India.

¶12. (U) NDMA is well informed on U.S. DM programs and efforts, and has given EmbOffs the following wish list for training expertise and

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collaboration opportunities. They also appear very receptive to learning about U.S. interests for collaboration as well.

- Training in medical response to mass casualty events of all types (CBRN, epidemics, trauma, etc).
- The U.S. National Guard State Partnership Program (SPP).
- Helicopter search and rescue capabilities, including "heli-slithering".
- Scaling up the Incident Command System to all disaster-prone districts in the country. Training and technology for coordination of responses between national, state and local organizations. How to work together, leverage strengths, and communicate effectively.
- Observation of U.S. DM exercises, and training in how to conduct such exercises in India. Example: the U.S. TOPOFF exercise.
- Best practices in training and technology to prepare for and respond to CBRN and explosives events. Including how to coordinate responses, manage casualties, deal with forensics and other law-enforcement issues, etc.
- U.S. Participation in their conference on Chemical Disasters in Mumbai, aimed at reducing risk of chemical incidents and increasing capabilities to respond to them.
- Development of systems and capabilities for dissemination of disaster warning information to the general public.

COMMENT:

¶13. (SBU) India's focus areas for its next steps in DM create openings for effective collaboration efforts that could support both U.S. policy interest in India and the region and domestic U.S. DM requirements. For example, NDMA is exploring methods to effectively disseminate warnings to a general public who relies heavily on mobile phones, rather than internet, and may be functionally illiterate. In addition, NDMA's interest in the security of CBRN materials, capability to respond to explosions and CBRN emergencies, and cyber terrorism - areas that Embassy has traditionally found the GOI very hesitant to engage on - could be exploited to further U.S. counterterrorism policies in India. The Embassy has included NDMA as one of the potential Indian partners for cooperation as outlined in the proposed U.S.-India Counterterrorism and Law Enforcement Cooperation Initiative.

¶14. (SBU) NDMA members told EmbOffs that they were interested in access to U.S. expertise and technology, not in funding. Indeed, when funds in the USAID agreement for technical assistance were exhausted, the GOI agreed to shift funds from procurement to technical assistance, adjusting their budget to cover the cost of equipment and extend USAID's technical advice for an additional year. NDMA's efforts fairly successfully cut across government ministries and agencies - a unique capability within the GOI. Engagement with NDMA is likely to offer a chance to cut through the stifling bureaucracy and engage with the personnel and agencies on the pointy end of the spear that are most lacking adequate training and materials (REF B.) It also provides an opportunity to increase both Indian and regional capabilities to prepare for, mitigate, respond to and manage disasters. However, we remain mindful that a weak link could be the bureaucratic necessity of working through the MHA, which is notoriously territorial, on many issues. For more information on any of these topics or to request assistance in engaging with Indian DM agencies, please contact EST Heather Broman (BromanHW@state.gov) and USAID Elizabeth Callender (ecallender@usaid.gov). END COMMENT

